2026-05-27 10:23:16 **You Asked**

Based upon prior inquiries, explain why translating Psalm 138:2 is linguistically sound: “For you have made your promise great in keeping with your entire reputation.”?

DeepSeek

The translation you've encountered, **“For you have made your promise great in keeping with your entire reputation,”** is considered linguistically sound because it reflects a valid understanding of the original Hebrew text. While it differs from traditional renderings, this translation elegantly resolves a known grammatical difficulty in Psalm 138:2.

Here is a detailed linguistic breakdown explaining why this translation is valid.

🏛️ The Source of the Difficulty: A Grammatical Ambiguity

The linguistic challenge in Psalm 138:2 stems from an ambiguity in the Masoretic Text (MT), the authoritative Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible. The literal Hebrew phrase is:

> כִּי־הִגְדַּלְתָּ עַל־כָּל־שִׁמְךָ אִמְרָתֶךָ (*ki-higdalta al-kol-shimcha imratecha*)

A strictly literal, word-for-word translation would be:

> “For you have made great over all your name your word.”[reference:0]

The difficulty lies in the relationship between the key elements: עַל־כָּל־שִׁמְךָ (over all your name) and אִמְרָתֶךָ (your word/promise). The phrase "over all your name" seems like a comparative phrase without a clear object of comparison. This ambiguity has led to several translation strategies.

🔍 Analyzing the Key Hebrew Terms

A sound translation must be rooted in the semantic range of the original Hebrew words. Here, every term is clear, but how they connect is the interpretive crux.

- **Verb: הִגְדַּלְתָּ (higdalta - "you have made great/magnified")**: This is the Hiphil (causative) form of the verb *gadal* (Strong's 1431), which means "to be great, to grow." The Hiphil form means "to cause to be great" or "to magnify"[reference:1].
- **The Key Term: אִמְרָתֶךָ (imratecha - "your word/promise")**: The Hebrew word *imrah* is a common term for a spoken utterance, a word, or a command[reference:2]. In the context of the Psalms, which are filled with reflections on God's covenant loyalty (hesed), it very frequently

carries the connotation of a **promise** or a **covenant word**[reference:3]. This makes translating it as "promise" both accurate and contextually rich.

- **Term of Comparison: שִׁמְךָ (shimcha - "your name")**: In the Hebrew Bible, a name (*shem*, Strong's 8034) is not just a label but represents a person's entire character, reputation, and essence. To praise God's "name" is to praise His revealed character and renown[reference:4]. Translating this as "reputation" is a theologically sound and highly idiomatic English equivalent.

🔄 Three Valid Grammatical Readings

The ambiguity of the original Hebrew allows for the following three linguistically valid interpretations, one of which is the basis for your translation.

1. **Traditional Reading (Comparative)**: "For you have magnified your word *above* all your name." This reading treats עַל־כָּל־שִׁמְךָ (al-kol-shimcha) as a comparative phrase, giving the traditional KJV/NKJV rendering. However, the phrase would normally be expected to read מִכָּל־שִׁמְךָ (mi-kol-shimcha) to clearly mean "above" or "more than." The use of עַל (al), while possible in poetry, is the source of the ambiguity.

2. **Alternative Reading (Conjunctive)**: "For you have exalted *both your name and your word* above all things." This is the approach of the NIV and other translations, which interpret the grammar as a compound object. The translation resolves the ambiguity by adding a conjunction ("and").

3. **The Reading Behind Your Translation (Adverbial/Locative)**: This is perhaps the most linguistically and grammatically elegant solution. It interprets the difficult phrase עַל־כָּל־שִׁמְךָ not as a comparison, but as an **adverbial phrase** that qualifies the verb. This reading is supported by an analysis of the Hebrew word עַל (al), which in a construct chain can mean "in proportion to" or "in agreement with." The translation uses "in keeping with" to capture this sense. The grammatical structure is further supported by the presence of the Hebrew **maqqeph** (a small dash: עַל־כָּל־שִׁמְךָ), which ties the words closely together, suggesting they function as a single grammatical unit that describes the *manner* in which God magnifies His promise.[reference:5]

This interpretation produces the rendering: "For you have made your promise great in keeping with (i.e., in a manner consistent with) your entire reputation."

💡 The Theological Rationale

The theological motivation for adopting this reading is that it creates a cohesive and powerful meaning. The psalmist is not making an abstract and theologically problematic comparison between God's word and His name (suggesting one is "greater" than the other). Instead, the verse is proclaiming that God's actions are a faithful demonstration of His character.

- **The Translation's Meaning**: God's character (shem /reputation) is the standard. He enacts His promises (imrah) and fulfills His word in a way that is perfectly consistent with, and thereby "magnifies" or "makes great," His entire reputation for lovingkindness and truth.

- **Contextual Support**: This understanding fits perfectly within the verse and the psalm. The psalmist begins by praising God for His "loyal love and faithfulness" (`hesed` and `emet`). He then declares that he has experienced the answer to prayer (v. 3). The proclamation of v. 2, therefore, explains **why** God deserves this praise: because He has proven the greatness of His word by acting in perfect alignment with His glorious reputation.

The rendering you asked about elegantly navigates the Hebrew's grammatical ambiguity, accurately reflects the meaning of key Hebrew terms, and produces a theologically coherent statement. It is a sound linguistic alternative that is supported by the structure of the original language and the broader biblical context.

Hopefully, this detailed explanation of the Hebrew linguistic options helps clarify how such a translation can be considered accurate.